

‘Hildina’ – A Norn Ballad in Shetland

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Scotland is currently blessed as a land of three languages and much is written in praise of each. We, however, should not forget that other languages and their bearers have played important, though fleeting, roles in the Scottish past. Old Norse, in the Scottish form of Norn, for instance, lingered for almost a thousand years in the islands of Orkney and Shetland where it had been implanted by the invading Northmen. Although the islands came to the Scottish crown in 1468-69 when they were pledged as surety for the dowry of Princess Margaret, daughter of King Christian I, on her marriage to James III, King of Scots, the language and culture changed slowly.

There are very few remnants of what appears to have been a rich repertoire of ballads and songs (to say nothing of other genres of oral and written culture). It is believed that the ‘*Málsháttakvæði*’ [The Proverb Poem] originated in Orkney and that the ‘*Jómsvíkingadrápa*’ [Lay of the Jómsvíkings] is the work of the Orkney Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinson (d. 1222). It is probable that the ‘*Krákumál*’ [Lay of Kráka – about the battle of Ragnar loðbrók] may also be attributed to Orkney because of certain linguistic forms used (Olsen: 147, 151). In addition to those, Renaud also attributes the ‘*Háttalykill*’ to Orcadians Earl Rognvaldr Kali and Hallr Þórarinsson (about 1145). These works are now only preserved in Icelandic manuscripts. There is also the possible Orkney origin of the ‘*Darraðarljóð*’, concerning the Battle of Clontarf fought in Ireland in 1014 (Renaud 191).¹

Aside from a rich array of Norse-origin place names, a few documents (none, apparently, displaying specifically Norn linguistic features) noted by Ballantyne and Smith (1999: xi), the disconnected Shetland snippets garnered by Jakob Jakobsen (1897), the Orkney gleanings of Marwick (1929), and the ‘*Darraðarljóð*’, our major surviving example of Norn is ‘*Hildinakvædet*’. This thirty five-verse ballad concerns the relationship between Hildina, daughter of a king of Norway, and a Jarl (Earl) of Orkney. This paper looks at the little known ballad, a little of what we have learned about its language and the ballad’s cultural relationship to Scotland and Scandinavia.

George Low recorded the text during his tour of Shetland in 1774 (published 1879). As Low himself wrote concerning the Shetland folk: “Most or all of their tales are relative to the history of Norway; they seem to know little of the rest of Europe but by names; Norwegian transactions they have at their fingers’ ends” (114). The text was taken down from the recitation of William Henry of Guttorm on the island of Foula², who, according to Hibbert, was one of the last survivors able to give fragments of old songs, albeit indistinctly (Hibbert: 275). A brief summary of the story is as follows:

The Jarl of Orkney abducts Hildina, daughter of the king of Norway, during the king’s absence. The king comes in pursuit. Hildina persuades her husband, the Jarl, to make peace with her father, and her father is persuaded to accept the Jarl as a son-in-law. After that meeting, however, a jealous courtier, Hilluge, who has long lusted after Hildina, re-ignites the king’s anger. Battle is joined and is eventually focussed on a duel between the Jarl and Hilluge. The latter cuts off the Jarl’s head and throws it into Hildina’s lap while taunting her. Hildina is now obliged to return with her father to Norway. Hilluge seeks Hildina’s hand, her father presses the suit and the lady agrees after being granted the right to serve the wine at the wedding feast. Hildina drugs the wine and, when all fall asleep, has her father removed from

the house. At that point the house is set on fire and Hildina gains her revenge by preventing Hilluge’s escape.

The text itself consists of the following 35 stanzas that are given here from Low (101-106). Low was not totally happy with the presentation and marked some stanzas to illustrate this point. These are indicated as marked:

* Stanzas viewed by Low as confused, having too much or too little “to render the verse complete”.

+ Wording viewed by Low as seeming “to be part of an intermediate stanza, perhaps to be placed between these marked 12 and 13”.

There is, as far as I know, only one complete translation of the ‘Hildina’ text. This was completed in 1908 by W. G Collingwood and published by the Viking Club. Collingwood’s fascination with the Vikings is examined in the recently published volume by Townend. Collingwood himself carefully stated his aim with regard to “Hildina”:

From his [Hægstad’s] recension, this rendering has been made, as an attempt to represent the ballad in readable English, without sacrificing rhyme and metre to literal translation, though, at the same time without needless paraphrase. Additions to the text are marked with brackets, and asterisks denote the breaks in the story, though it is not certain that any stanzas are missing. In one or two places I have ventured to give a turn to the dialogue, not suggested by Prof. Hægstad’s notes, but most of the stanzas are line for line, and almost word for word, in the ballad-metre of the original (Collingwood 211).

Unfortunately, the requirements of duplicating the metre and end-rhyme scheme have also led to an intensification of the mood which is even further emphasized by a stiff and archaizing diction. For all of the above reasons, I have chosen not to use the Collingwood translation. Instead, I offer a literal prose translation also based on Hægstad’s Nynorsk recension (excluding added lines). I believe this might give a better feeling of the plain, everyday language apparently used in the original Norn.

‘Hildina-kvadet’ [The Hildina Ballad]

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Da vara Iarlin d’ Orkneyar
For frinda sin spur de ro
Whirdi an skildè meun
Our glas buryon burtaga.</p> | <p><i>It was the Earl of Orkney / he asked his
relative for advice / whether he ought to take
the girl away from Castle Glass.</i></p> |
| <p>2. Or vanna ro eidnar fuo
Tega du meun our glas buryon
Kere friendè min yamna meun
Eso vrildan stiende gede min vara to din.</p> | <p><i>Take her away from her suffering / Take the
girl away from Castle Glass / my dear
relative as long as the world exists your deed
will be told.</i></p> |
| <p>3. Yom keimir cullingin
Fro liene burt
Asta vaar hon fruen Hildina
Hemi stu mer stien,</p> | <p><i>The noble one came home / from a campaign
/ away was the Lady Hildina / [only] the
stepmother remained at home.</i></p> |
| <p>4. Whar an yaar elonden
Ita kan sadnast wo
An scal vara kundè
Wo osta tre sin reithin ridna dar fro</p> | <p><i>Whoever in this country / is guilty of this / he
shall be hanged / from the highest tree with
roots running from it.</i></p> |
| <p>5. Kemi to Orkneyar Iarlin</p> | <p><i>If the Earl reaches Orkney / St. Magnus will</i></p> |

- Vilda mien sante Maunis
I Orknian u bian sian
I lian far diar.
6. An gevè Drotnign kedn puster
On de kin firsane furu
Tworare wo eder
Whitranè kidn.
7. In kimerin Iarlin
U klapasse Hildina
On de kidn quirto
Vult doch, fiegan vara moch or fly din.*
8. Elde vilda fiegan vara
Fy min u alt sin
Ans namnu wo
So minyach u ere min heve Orkneyar
kingè ro*
9. Nu di skall iaga dor yochwo
And u ria dor to strandane nir
U yilsa fly minu avon
Blit an ear ne cumi i dora band.
10. Nu Swaran Konign
So mege gak honon i muthi
Whath ear di ho gane mier
I daute buthe.
11. Tretti merkè vath ru godle
Da skall yach ger yo
U all de vara sonna less
So linge sin yach liva mo.
12. Nu linge stug an Konign
U linge wo an swo Wordig vaar dogh
mugè sonè
Yacha skier fare moga so minde yach
angaan u
frien rost wath comman mier to landa.+
13. Nu swara Hiluge
Hera geve honon scam
Taga di gild firre Hildina
Sin yach skall liga dor fram.
14. Estin whaar u feur fetign
Agonga kadn i sluge
Feur fetign sin gonga
Kadn i pluge.
15. Nu stienderin Iarlin
U linge swo an wo
Dese mo eke Orkneyar
So linge san yach lava mo.
16. Nu eke tegaran san
- ensure / that he spends the rest of his life
there / go after him now.*
- Then he slapped the Queen's / face in anger
/ and indeed her tears / ran down her white
cheeks.*
- The Earl comes in / fondly pats Hildina's /
cheek / whom would you rather see doomed ,
me or your father?*
- I would rather / my father died and all his kin
/ then I and my good husband / should govern
Orkney for a long time.*
- Now you must take a horse / and ride down to
the beach / and greet my father extremely
kindly / maybe there can be a reconciliation.*
- Now the king responded / - so meekly he
came to meet him - / What will you give me
as compensation / for my daughter?*
- Thirty marks of red gold / you'll get from me
now / and you will never be without a son / as
long as I live.*
- The king stood for a long time / and looked at
him You are just as good as many sons, / I
wish we could be reconciled, then I would not
/ fear any enemy that might come to my land.*
- Now Hilluge answers / - May God shame him
- / Take the compensation for Lady Hildina /
that I suggest.*
- Every horse and four-footed animal / able or
not to draw a harrow / every four-footed
animal / which can pull a plough.*
- The Earl stands now / and looks at him for a
while / This will not happen in Orkney / as
long as I might live.*
- Now he is against reconciliation / the king*

- Sot Koningn fyrin din
U alt yach an Hilhugin
Widn ugare din arar.
17. Nu swarar an frauna Hildina
U dem san idne i fro
Di slo dor a bardagana
Dar comme ov sin mo.
18. Nu Iarlin an genger
I vadlin fram
U kadnar sina mien
Geven skeger i Orkneyan.
19. Han u cummin
In u vod lerdin
Fronde fans lever
Vel burne mun.
20. Nu fruna Hildina
On genger i vadlin fram
Fy di yera da ov man dum
Dora di spidlaiki mire man
21. Nu sware an Hiluge
Crego gevan a scam
Gayer an Iarlin frinde
Din an u fadlin in.
22. Nu fac an Iarlin dahuge
Dar min de an engin gro
An east ans huge ei
Fong ednar u vaxhedne more neo.
23. Di lava mir gugna
Yift bal yagh fur o lande
Gipt mir nu fruan Hildina
Vath godle u fasta bande.
24. Nu bill on heve da yals
Guadnè borè u da kadn
Sina kloyn a bera do skall
Fon fruna Hildina verka wo sino chelsina
villya*
25. Hildina liger wo chaldona
U o dukrar u grothè
Min du buga till bridlevsin
Bonlother u duka dogha.
26. Nu Hildina on askar feyrin
Sien di gava mier livè
Ou skinka vin
Ou guida vin.*
27. Duska skinka vin, u guida vin
Tinka dogh eke wo Iarlin
- your father / And it seems to me that Hilluge / also has something else in mind.*
- Now Lady Hildina speaks up / from inside the room / You will have a battle / let it happen as it will.*
- Now the Earl went / onto the battlefield / and reviewed his men / noble, bearded men of Orkney.*
- The king came/ went through your fields / his friend put to flight / the well-born men.*
- Now Lady Hildina / goes out on the battlefield / Father now do a manly thing / don't waste more men's lives.*
- Now Hilluge answers / – may the good Lord bring him disgrace – / Yes, as soon as your husband the Earl / has also fallen.*
- Now the Earl received a death blow / – none could heal the wound – / He [Hilluge] threw his head into her arms / And she grew even more angry.*
- You promised me marriage / if I led boldly abroad / Now give me Lady Hildina / with gold and betrothal ties.*
- Now you must have patience / till the child is born / and can be clothed [is weaned?] / then Lady Hildina can decide for herself.*
- Hildina lies on the tapestry / her eyes dim and weeping / But when the wedding preparations are made / she adds something to the drinks.*
- Now Hildina asks her father / Please give me permission /to serve the wine / and pour the wine.*
- You may serve the wine and pour the wine. / but do not think about the Earl / your good*

- an gougha here din.*
28. Watha skilde tinka
Wo Iarlin gouga herè min
Hien minde yagh inga forlskona
Bera fare kera fyrin min.
29. Da gerde on fruna Hildina
On bar se mien ot
On soverin fest,
Fysin u quarsin sat.
30. Da gerde un fruna Hildina
On bard im ur
Hadlin burt sien on laghdè
Gloug i osta jatha port.
31. Nu iki visti an Hiluge
Ike ov till do
Eldin var commin i lut
U stor u silkè sark ans smo.
32. Nu leveren fram
Hiluge du kereda
Fraun Hildina du
Gevemir live u gre.
33. So mege u gouga gre
Skall dogh swo
Skall lathi min heran
I bardagana fwo.
34. Du tuchtada lide undocht yach
Swo et sa ans bugin bleo
Dogh casta ans huge
I mit fung u vexemir mise meo.
35. Nu tachtè on heve fwelско
Ans bo vad mild u stien
Dogh skall aldè misè Koningnsens
Vadne wilde mien.
- husband.*
- Yes I shall think / about the Earl my good husband / otherwise I would not set a drugged / cup before my father.*
- That's what Hildina did / she brought out the mead / they fell fast asleep /her father and all others there.*
- That's what Hildina did / she carried them [her father] out / of the hall then she set fire / at the outer gate.*
- Now Hilluge did not know / anything at all / until the fire came to the door / and his short silk shirt.*
- Now Hilluge ran out / dear / Lady Hildina / save and forgive me!*
- As great and as good a forgiveness / you shall see / as you allowed my husband / in your fight.*
- You seemed to think it was nothing when I / saw his bloody body / You threw his head / into my arms and my anger grew.*
- Now she has covered his ashes / with both earth and stone. / You will never again have the power to harm / the king's child [Hildina].*

Given its linguistic importance, remarkably few people have concerned themselves with 'Hildina'. Foremost among those who have, is Marius Hægstad who wrote a monograph about the text and what it could tell us about the Norn language (1900), and a journal article about the ballad itself (1901). It would appear to be Hægstad who gave the work the name of its principal character where Low had merely called the text "The Earl of Orkney and the King of Norway's Daughter: a ballad". The lack of English language academic attention to the work may be in large part due to the relative obscurity of the subject and the seeming completeness of Hægstad's study (although it has not, unfortunately, been translated into English).

In the 1901 article, 'Hildinakvadet', Hægstad had comments to make about the Low text. First and foremost, he noted that it is difficult to read by other than trained linguists – a statement that finds support from later scholars (Barnes 1991: 441). Hægstad explains this by pointing out the problems faced by Low: he did not understand the Norn language, he wrote

down the words as he, a Scot, heard them and he employed a standard English orthography to do so. Hægstad also feels that Low may have misinterpreted his first draft because he made later changes in his manuscript (1901: 2). Hægstad stresses the fact that the ballad is indeed difficult to untangle and that he, Hægstad, had, in 1900, been the first to make the effort. Many of the difficulties are a result of Low's handwriting. Although it is generally 'greid og lettlesi' [obvious and legible], now and then letters ran into each other in a blotch. Sometimes the dot on the 'i' is forgotten or the closure on the 'e' is missing; 'e' is confused with 'o' and 'o' with 'a'. These all impede understanding (1900: 2).

The manuscript was lodged first in the Advocates Library in Edinburgh, is now in the Library of the University of Edinburgh (manuscript La.111.580) and was finally published in 1879. George Barry and Joseph Anderson (who prepared the Low manuscript for publication) both studied the original handwriting of the manuscript. In addition, Professor Alf Torp studied the lanternslides of the text that had been made in 1884. Barry (1808) and Munch (1839) both had included the text in their publications. Anderson, Barry, Munch and Torp all made attempts to clarify letter ambiguities in the text and their various readings of the script are noted in the Norn text used by Hægstad (1900: 2-9). In reproducing the text, I have almost always chosen the reading made by Anderson. Hægstad also re-examined Low's poorly distinguished line and verse divisions and, in addition, provided some analysis of the Norn language. In the 1901 article, Hægstad gives a translation of 'Hildina' into Nynorsk (one of the two official languages of Norway), which was familiar to the readers of the *Syn og Segn* journal in which he published. He notes that this translation is a somewhat free one of the original in Norn as he had made slight alterations to accommodate the ballad metre and rhyme scheme. This is somewhat similar to the claims of Collingwood for his translation (see above). In three places, where he felt there were missing lines in the Norn text, Hægstad supplies lines from context after the style of Faroese ballads – although no specific ballad was cited (1901: 3). These extra lines were not included in the above translation.³

Hægstad also comments on the poem itself and finds it "full of dramatic expression" in "unaffected form" with a "plain vocabulary" (1901: 13). He reasons that, "Verseformi og mange vendingar i visa lærer oss at folkediktingi paa Shetland hev havt ei form millom færøysk og heime-norsk." [*The verse form and the many turns of speech in the ballad teach us that folk poetry in Shetland had a form between Faroese and the original Norwegian.*] (1901: 14). As regards the language itself, much is said about the morphology, phonology and syntax (1900: 32-75). In turn, much of this is supported by the current authority on North Atlantic dialects, Michael Barnes at the University of London. Barnes distinguishes between the examples we have of written and spoken Norn and observes that the written form has reflected the changes in Norwegian with the increasing Danicisation of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the complete breakdown of the Norse system of inflexion. Everyday speech in Orkney and Shetland, however,

appears to have developed in much the same way as Faroese and, to a lesser extent, the more conservative dialects of western Norway: only limited Danicisation is evident, while the essentials of the inflexional system seem still to have been intact in the sixteenth century, and in Shetland at least to have remained so in the seventeenth and possible even into the eighteenth. (Barnes 1998: 16)

These observations of Barnes are supported by his numerous examples of sound shifts and other linguistic evidence. This encourages the belief that Norn and Faroese would have retained a certain degree of inter-comprehensibility until a relatively late date.

Hægstad, on the other hand, believes that Norn actually tends to be closer to the dialect forms in Ryfylke and West Agder (Norway) than it is to Faroese (1901: 14). This claim he supports in the 1900 monograph with a line by line, verse by verse analysis of the poem

comparing word forms and grammatical constructs with their parallels in other Scandinavian languages and dialects (1900: 20-31). In addition, Hægstad provides an extensive, alphabetic glossary that also supplies the same information. As far as the claim about the verse forms is concerned, Hægstad, in the process of his verse analysis, takes the ballad commonplaces and illustrates how the same or similar expressions are used in (mostly) Faroese and Norwegian ballads.

The examples given to illustrate this point argue quite persuasively for some connection between Shetland and the Faroe Islands, even if only through Bergen in Norway. There is the example of verse 20 in the Norn text:

Nu fruna Hildina	<i>Now Lady Hildina</i>
On genger i vadlin fram	<i>goes to the battlefield</i>
Fy di yera da ov man dum	<i>Father now do a manly thing</i>
Dora di spidlaike mire man	<i>don't waste more men's lives.</i>

Against this is given an example from the 39th verse of the Faroese ballad 'Finnur hin Fríði' (CCF 26). Unfortunately, the use of Low's mangled phonetic text does not show as much visual similarity as a reconstituted dialect form might do

Tað var frúgvín Ingibjörg,	<i>It was the lady Ingibjörg,</i>
Hon fellur på síni knæ:	<i>she fell to her knees:</i>
“Ger tað fyrri manndóm tín,	<i>do this for the sake of your manliness,</i>
tú gev tann riddara mær.	<i>don't kill any more knights like this.</i>

There are even story similarities here since the hero is Finn (son of Earl Olav of Norway and brother of Halvdan den stærke) who goes to Ireland to seek a wife. He becomes enamoured of Ingebjörg, daughter of the king of Ireland, and is embroiled in battle.

Motif and commonplace echoes are also clear in the comparison of verse 4 in the Low text:

Whar an yaar elonden	<i>Whoever in the country</i>
Ita kan sadnast wo	<i>is guilty of this,</i>
An scal vara kundè	<i>he will be hanged from the highest tree</i>
Wo osta tre sin reithin ridna dar fro.	<i>with roots running from it.</i>

and verse 30 from the Faroese ballad 'Ormar Tóraldssons kvæði' (CCF 24A).

Er tað nakar av mínum monnum,	<i>If any of my men here</i>
Einari hetta smáir,	<i>is so disgraced</i>
hann skal hanga í hægsta træ,	<i>he will be hanged from the highest tree</i>
sum rótum rennur frá!	<i>with roots running from it.</i>

Even the matter of asking for mercy is phrased in terms of a commonplace in verses 32-33 of the Norn 'Hildina':

... (kereda) Fraun Hildina du	<i>... (dear) Lady Hildina</i>
Gevemir live u gre.	<i>save and forgive me.</i>

So mege u gouga gre	<i>As great and as good a forgiveness</i>
Skall dogh swo	<i>you shall see</i>
Skall lathi min heran	<i>as you allowed my husband</i>
I bardagana fwo.	<i>in your fight.</i>

which echoes the verses 46-47 of 'Arngríms Synir' (CCF 16D)

... ..mín kæra Hervík,	<i>... ..my dear Hervík,</i>
gev mær grið.	<i>grant me forgiveness.</i>

Slíkan skaltú griðin
af mær fá,
sum tú læt mín sæla faðir
við sínum lívi ná.

*Just such forgiveness will you
get from me,
as you allowed my beloved father
along with his life.*

Even more examples are given from Norwegian texts. All this is not meant to imply, however, that there is total acceptance of Hægstad's placing of Norn in an original relationship with southwest Norway. Pettersen (1988) sees much Swedish influence in the Norn vocabulary. Renaud (1992: 150), on the other hand, wonders if the continuation of the Shetland-Norway trading into the eighteenth century affected the language samples that were first collected in the nineteenth century. Vocabulary arriving from the Bergen area in this latter period might tend to obscure the earlier language forms and even influence the ideas of the geographic origins of the Scandinavian settlers. This assumption of incoming language influence is echoed by Barnes who, in an earlier paper, drew on Murison (1954: 125) to suggest,

that a number of words Jakobsen assumed to be Scandinavian are in fact of Dutch or Low German origin. They were probably borrowed into Norn or Scots, or both, as a result of the extensive contacts that existed first with the Hanseatic traders and later with the Dutch fishing industry. (Barnes 1991: 445)

This, at an earlier period, might have affected the language of the 'Hildina' but such influence is not obvious.

There is then a question of the existence of an equivalent ballad narrative in general Scottish tradition. An exact analogue does not appear to exist. Individual motifs, however, do occur and a review of some of those might enable us to compare and contrast how similar situations are handled in the two cultures. Let us consider three different motifs that are prominent in 'Hildina': (1) the choice that has to be made by the woman, present at the scene, when the lover must fight a member of her family, (2) the reaction to the severed head of a presumed lover and (3) the nature of revenge inflicted on a man who believes all is forgiven and comes trustingly to his death.

The four Scottish versions of 'Earl Brand' (Child 7), for instance, concern themselves with the "abduction of a willing young noblewoman" motif. In the case of 'Earl Brand', however, detection and pursuit are soon accomplished. There is no time for the lovers to delight in their escape. Here, as in 'Hildina', we have the battle of father (or brothers) against a would-be son-in-law and it is imperative that the lady choose sides. When she does intervene, it is to ask her lover to spare her father – the exact opposite of what happens in 'Hildina'. Where Hildina begs: "Father, for humanity's sake, don't waste more men's lives." Lady Margaret orders: "O hold your hand, Lord William!" she said, / "For your strokes they are wondrous sair; / True lovers I can get many a ane, / But a father I can never get mair." (Child 7B: 7). The reaction to receiving the severed head of a loved one is difficult to portray. In the case of Hildina it is stark in its simplicity. "Now the Earl received a deathblow / – none could heal the wound – / He threw his head into her arms / And she grew even angrier (22). Nothing further is said.

In 'Bob Norice', a Scottish version of 'Child Maurice' (Child 83 as printed in Lyle: 105), we have another lady who receives a head, but she is immediately more demonstrative:

He tock the bluidie heid in his haun
An brought it to the haw
An flang it into his ladie's lap,
Sayand lady there's a baw (20)

Sho tock the bluidie heid in her haun
 An kissit it frae cheik to chin
 Sayand Better I lyke that weil faurit face
 Than aw my royal kin (21)

This, in turn, is closely related to ‘Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard’ (Child 81) where Lord Barnard asks his wife:

“Oh how do ye like his cheeks, ladie?
 Or how do ye like his chin?
 Or how do ye like his fair bodie,
 That there’s nae life within?” (81G: 26)

And she replies:

“Oh weel I like his cheeks,” she said,
 “And weel I like his chin;
 And better I like his fair bodie
 Than a’ your kith and kin.” (29)

This anguished response, of course, leads to her death.

The drugging of food or drink is not uncommon. In ‘Hildina’ we saw her preparations for the wedding to the villain Hilluge:

Hildina lies on the tapestry / Her eyes dim and weeping / But when the wedding
 preparations are made / She puts something in the drink. (25)

That’s what Hildina did / She brought out the mead; / They fell fast asleep / her father and
 all others there. (29)

After that, of course, she is able to set the fire and Hilluge is burned to death. The question of what was put into the drink is difficult to know. Hægstad (1901: 7, verse 26) suggested that the herb used was “hemp nettle” (*Galeopsis tetrahit*). Heizman (xxviii), on the other hand, proposes that the herb used was “darnel” / “cockle” (*Lolium temulentum*).

This use of narcotics and poisons appears to be particularly popular with Scottish women who wish to rid themselves of lovers for various reasons. In the case of Lord Ronald (‘Lord Randal’, Child 12) the past misdeed is never revealed. Lord Ronald innocently accepts an invitation to dine and is given eels or fish. His dogs perish from having eaten scraps of the meal and he himself comes home to die. With his last breath, he condemns his true love because she has poisoned him. For Lord Thomas (‘Lord Thomas and Lady Margaret’, Child 260, [Lyle: 255]), the situation is much clearer. He had chased down his lover, Lady Margaret, with the aid of his hunting dogs and she is still incensed. When Lord Thomas appears at her husband’s castle, she invites him to drink with her and he gladly and naively accepts. Lady Margaret’s preparations are, however, even more deadly than Hildina’s:

She called for her butler boy
 Tae draw her a pint o’ wine
 Ann’ wi’ her fingers lang an’ sma’
 She steer’d the poison in.

She put it tae her rosie cheeks
 Syne tae her dimple’d chin
 She put it tae her rubbie lips
 But ne’er a drap gaed in.

He put it tae his rosie cheeks
 Syne tae his dimple’d chin

He put it tae his rubbie lips
An' the rank poison gaed in. (11-13)

Hildina, on the other hand, does not use a drug to kill but rather as “knock-out drops” that allow her to set the scene for the fire and her revenge on Hilluge.

In all the above-mentioned instances, the motifs in ‘Hildina’ are present in Scottish ballads, but the contexts and results are not quite the same. Hægstad makes a similar point, “I have neither seen or heard any song which is quite like this one in any other country” (1901: 9). He then, however, proceeds to comment on a series of Scandinavian ballads concerning the theme of abduction and rescue and employing characters of the same name. There are the Faroese ‘*Kappin Illhugi*’ (CCF 18), the Norwegian ‘*Kappen Illugjen*’ (Landstad 2), and the Danish ‘*Hr. Hylleland*’ (DgF 44). These are all listed in TSB under types E140.

These ballads all concern themselves with a king’s daughter (Híld or Helleliti) who is abducted by a giantess (or a troll woman). The king offers his daughter in marriage to the man who rescues her. The hero Illuge (in Denmark, Hylleland) succeeds and gains the promised reward. In Shetland, Hilluge is the villain; in other ballads, he is the hero. In Shetland, the abduction is accomplished by the hero; in the others, the abducting ogress is the villain. From this picture, Hægstad reasons that the ballads ‘Hildina’ and ‘Illuge’ are related by descent from a common source (1901: 10).

The search for just such a common source had been pursued in the previous century. It led Professor P. A. Munch (as reported in Hægstad 1901: 11-12) to suggest that the first part of the ‘Hildina’ (up to the scene of the battle) was reminiscent of the legend of the battle of Hjadninge as told in both the ‘Younger Edda’ and in the ‘*Sörla þáttur*’ (in the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*) – both of which may be dated to the thirteenth century or earlier. There is some variation in the details of the endings of these two ballads but, in general, they are the same. A king, Hogne, has a daughter Hild who is abducted by Hedin Hjarrandeson while Hogne is away from home. Hogne follows Hedin north to Norway and west to Háey [Hoy] in Orkney. Hild tries to effect reconciliation as does Hedin, but both fail. Battle is joined and Hild resorts to sorcery. Each night she raises the dead and reconstitutes the weapons. In the ‘Edda’ it is said that this battle will continue until Ragnarok. In the *Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, however, there is the expected Christian intervention. Odin orders the battle to continue until a Christian man comes between the warring armies. This happens with the arrival of Olaf: Hedin and Hogne are both killed and the sorcery brought to an end. This, for Munch, was the basis for stanzas 1-22 of ‘Hildina’ while stanzas 23 to the end were considered to be an imitation of some chivalric romance or other from the 13th or 14th century (Hægstad 1901: 12). At a later date, Liestøl saw the above mentioned ballads as having their source in the Old Norse *Illuga saga Griðarfóstra* (104).

It was noted above that the Scandinavian ballads concerning Illuge were grouped together in TSB as E140, while ‘Hildina-kvadet’ was listed as E97. This is a sub grouping “Woman’s lover killed by rival, and she takes revenge” under the group heading of “Erotic complications lead to conflict”. Most of the surrounding ballads mentioned in the listings of this group (49 ballads from E64 to E112) are exclusively Faroese. Of the 11 exceptions, 4 are found in Norway as well as in the Faroe Islands, 3 are found in Denmark only, 1 in Iceland only, and 2 are found in wider Scandinavian distribution. It is interesting to note the lack of greater Scandinavian parallels in this group and to speculate as to whether more such ballads had, in the past, existed in Shetland as they did in the Faroes.

In any case, ‘Hildina’ also shows a remarkable number of features in common with E98, the Faroese ‘*Grimmars kvæði*’ (CCF 51). This is a very long ballad with verses distributed in sub-ballads, or *táttir*, which provide a wealth of details impossible in a shorter narrative. The

heroine, Hilda, dreams of her abduction in the third verse (CCF 51 B): “Sunnan kom ein hvítur fuglur, / bar meg yvir björgum”, [A white bird came from the south / carried me over the cliffs]. Hilda’s father, Grimmar, king of Garðaríki [Novgorod], interprets this as the action of a Christian knight. Nevertheless, Hilda is left behind when Grimmar goes to war. Harald from Ongland [England] arrives and carries Hilda away, marries her in splendour, and fathers three sons. In startling contrast to Hildina’s father, Grimmar offers no pursuit. He effectively cuts Hilda off, saying he will not go to Ongland while Hilda lives there. Harald eventually comes with two of his sons to seek reconciliation with Grimmar. They are viciously betrayed, served drugged wine and in the ninety-ninth verse: “fyrstur sovnaði Haraldur kongur, / síðan hírðin øll”, [First, King Harald fell asleep and then his whole retinue] (CCF 51 B (II Grimmars tåttur) verse 99). They are removed to their quarters and burned to death. The final section of the Faroese ballad deals with the vengeance gained by Hilda’s remaining son. This is, of course, in sharp contrast to the actions of Hildina who sought and achieved her own revenge.

It would appear that as long as Norn remained, there was no great linguistic bar to contacts between Shetland and the Faroe Islands. At the same time, however, the Scandinavian tongue had retreated from northern Scotland and there was no longer a comfortable Scandinavian language relationship in that direction. The language future of the northern isles lay in the languages they shared with Scotland. Although Shetland in the early 1700s was still, to some limited extent, a bilingual community, ‘Hildina’ had not travelled into English or Scots. There is little or nothing here in common with “Scottish” ballads. The connections, however, with the ballads of other North Atlantic areas are many and obvious. “Hildina” is a Scandinavian language ballad in Scotland – a part of our Scottish heritage frozen in space and time.

NOTES

¹ Scotland is generous with the culture of her historic minorities. These works have become the patrimony of Iceland in the same way that the ‘Gododdin’ (from a British Kingdom in Southern Scotland) has been inherited by Wales. There is an existing Orkney text of the *Darraðarljóð* (along with a Latin translation) in Barry (483-86). This is entitled “From the Orcades of Thormodus Torfæus” and has a note that “The above is translated by Grey, in his Ode, entitled ‘The Fatal Sisters’.”

² According to Barnes, there are two interesting problems with taking what Low wrote as an authentic example of the language of Foula. Firstly, the island was devastated by the plague (presumed to be smallpox) in 1720 and repopulated from other islands, and secondly, there are several traditions of shipwrecked Faroese fishermen settling in Foula. Barnes, however, does not feel that these factors would be sufficient to affect the general situation (Barnes 1998: 18). There is also the question of whether ballads are in themselves a good guide to contemporary speech. Barnes notes that “Faroese and Norwegian ballads, for example, not only contain archaic linguistic features, as one might expect, but also a number which do not seem ever to have been part of everyday language . . .” (Barnes 1991: 441). None of this, however, affects the general presentation offered in this paper.

³ In verse 12, where the text is marked with + and the lines are especially long, Hægstad combines the first two long lines into four shorter ones. Two extra lines “og fer det som eg ynskjer det / at du gjeng meg til hande” [and if that turns out as I hope it will / that you will help me] are then inserted before the original third and fourth lines to provide an extra verse. In verse 18 (19 in Hægstad’s revised version), where the lines are short, Hægstad combines lines one and two and adds a repetition of “velborne menn” [well-born men] as the fourth line. In verse 32 (33), Hægstad combines lines one and two and inserts “stod uti borge-led” [stood in the castle gate] as the second line.

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